Biblical Allusions in Shakespeare's *Richard II*

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with research distinction in English in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Samantha Kohlhorst

The Ohio State University

April 2018

Project Advisor: Professor Hannibal Hamlin, Department of English

Introduction

Throughout many of his plays, Shakespeare alludes to history, religion, and famous works of literature, both from Greco-Roman antiquity and the Renaissance period. His historical tetralogy, especially *Richard II*, allude most heavily to the bible and historical sources such as Holinshed and Daniel. These allusions allow Shakespeare to dramatize the historical story of Richard II's fall from power while still keeping the plot mostly historically accurate. Though many scholars argue that Shakespeare did not care much about maintaining historical accuracy in his plays, the plot structure of *Richard II* is similar to many of Shakespeare's primary sources. Many of the historical inaccuracies in the play are due to his various allusions, mostly those to the bible.

Because the Elizabethan period was so saturated in Christian biblical culture, Shakespeare's *Richard II* often alludes to various verses from different translations of the bible, all of which have a strong impact on scholars' understandings of *Richard II* and its implications in Shakespeare's own day. By alluding to the book of Genesis and in particular the Garden of Eden, Shakespeare allows various characters to suggest that England, prior to the Wars of the Roses, was a prelapsarian paradise. Other characters also compare England to the Garden of Eden, though to varying effects. Some characters, such as John of Gaunt and the gardeners, use these allusions to Eden to blame Richard for the fall of England from grace, while others, such as the queen, use these allusions to place blame onto other characters. Allusions to the book of Genesis are also used to frame the entirety of the play; in the initial scene of the play, Mowbray references the story of Cain and Abel. This same story is referenced in the final scene of the play by Bolingbroke. Much like with the references to the Garden of Eden, these two allusions to Cain and Abel have varying effects on the play.

In addition to the book of Genesis, Shakespeare also alludes heavily to various passages of the bible that discuss the divine right of kings. Throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, monarchs and ministers commonly believed that the king was chosen by God to rule over a group of people. This understanding of the king as God's deputy is reinforced throughout Shakespeare's play by numerous characters, such as the Bishop of Carlisle and Richard himself. While the basis for this understanding of the king as chosen by God originates in the book of Samuel, many of the threats made by Carlisle as to what will happen if Richard is deposed derive from various gospels. The understanding of the doctrine of divine right that is presented throughout *Richard II* can be summarized in Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies,* in which he describes the theory that the king is both a temporal person and an eternal mediator between heaven and earth. This understanding of the king as a twin-natured being causes Richard to view himself as a Christ-like figure. Throughout his deposition scene, Richard repeatedly accuses his former followers of being Judases and Pilates, though he also places himself among the traitors. That he presents himself both as a victim and a traitor suggests that Richard truly views himself as a twin-natured being – a combination of a mortal man and a heavenly being, much like Christ.

By making the protagonist and antagonist of the play fairly ambiguous, Shakespeare allows for his play to be interpreted in a variety of ways. While some scholars argue that *Richard II* presents Richard as the victim of Bolingbroke's rebellion, others argue that Bolingbroke is presented as the victim of Richard's tyrannous reign. Because of the political instability of the Elizabethan era, presenting Richard as a tyrant who was rightfully deposed would be extremely controversial, especially since many people believe that Elizabeth I and Richard are fairly similar. Elizabeth, too, appears to have recognized the similarities that people saw between

herself and Richard, as the deposition scene was not included in copies of the play that were published during her lifetime. Despite this controversial scene being nonexistent in prior printed editions of the play, *Richard II* still was viewed as politically sensitive; the Earl of Essex ordered for the play to be performed the night before he attempted to seize the throne from Elizabeth. Though his rebellion ultimately failed, the connection between it and *Richard II* suggests that the play discusses many politically sensitive topics that were disputed throughout Shakespeare's own day.

Despite the play being politically controversial during the Elizabethan period, it was still incredibly popular both during and after Shakespeare's lifetime. The various use of allusions, especially to the bible, allow for the play to be interpreted in countless ways. However, it is important that the audience is aware of which bible Shakespeare used when writing *Richard II,* as various translations of the bible, such as the Geneva and the Bishop's, were available during the Renaissance period.

The Bible in Shakespeare's Day

The most popular translation of the bible during Shakespeare's time was the Geneva Bible, which was translated in 1560 by English Protestants who had been in exile in Geneva during the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary.[1] While later editions of the Geneva Bible were printed in 1562 and 1570, the Geneva Bible was not printed in England until 1575.[2] The Geneva Bible became popular in England for a multitude of reasons. It was the first time that an English Bible was printed in Roman type which made it much easier to read, and most editions were published as a compact quarto edition which made them smaller and lighter than previous bibles.[3] The Geneva Bible was also the first Study Bible for the common person; it included maps, genealogies, chronologies, summaries, and copious explanatory notes in the margins.[4] In addition, the Geneva Bible divided the text into chapters and verses, unlike previous English translations of the bible which divided the text only into chapters. Each verse was numbered and made into its own paragraph to make quoting the bible much simpler.[5]

Shakespeare would also have been familiar with the Bishops' Bible, which became the official bible in the English Church once it was published in 1568.[6] After the 1562 publication of the Geneva Bible, the various defects in the Great Bible, which had been the previous official bible of the English Church, were made increasingly apparent. As a result, Archbishop Parker divided the bible into several parts and had various bishops and scholars revise them. It became

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[1] Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare.* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 9.
[2]Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare,* 10.
[3] Naseeb Shaheen, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's History Plays.* (Cranbury: Associated UP, 1989), 17.
[4] Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, 11.
[5] Shaheen, *Biblical References*, 17.
[6]Shaheen, *Biblical References*, 17.

known as the Bishops' Bible because the majority of the revisers were bishops in the English Church.[7] However, the Bishops' Bible had many defects as a result of these various translators. The New Testament was superior to the Old Testament since the revisers' knowledge and understanding of Greek was much stronger than that of their Hebrew. Also, the New Testament was completely revised in a later edition of the Bishops' Bible, whereas only minor revisions were made to the Old Testament.[8] As a result, the New Testament was much clearer than the Old Testament in all editions of the Bishops' Bible.

This translation of the bible was evidently not designed for private readings. As a heavy and expensive folio edition, the average person would have been unable to afford such a copy.[9] Furthermore, the instruction to the translators from Archbishop Parker to "mark dangerous parts in the text that should not be read in public"[10] confirms that this translation was meant to be read and interpreted by a member of the Church. However, the various images throughout the Bishops' Bible suggest that people could consult and view it in churches.[11] Although smaller editions of the Bishops' Bible were published later, they never became as popular as the Geneva Bible for personal use. However, people in England, such as Shakespeare, would have been familiar with this translation of the bible because it was used in the English Church during services.[12]

Since these were the two most popular translations of the bible and Shakespeare presumably had access to both of them, he most likely used them when alluding to biblical

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[7] Shaheen, *Biblical References*, 17.
[8] Shaheen, *Biblical References*, 18.
[9] Shaheen, *Biblical References*, 18.
[10] Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, 12.
[11] Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare,* 12.
[12] Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare,* 12.

passages in his play. However, many of Shakespeare's biblical references cannot be traced to one particular translation of the bible since the Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible are often too similar in how their verses are worded. However, many scholars believe that Shakespeare alluded to the Geneva Bible more frequently than any other translation. Because it was the most popular translation during his lifetime, it is plausible that he owned his own copy of the Geneva Bible,[13] which would have made directly quoting biblical verses in his plays much simpler.

There are a few instances throughout Shakespeare's *Richard II* where he clearly alludes to a specific translation of the bible which verifies that Shakespeare had access to both the Geneva and the Bishops' Bibles. For instance, in the beginning of the play, Mowbray states that "If ever I were traitor, / My name be blotted from the book of life."[14] The Bishops' Bible is the only translation that states in the book of Revelation, "I will not blot out his name out of the booke of life."[15] All other translations of the bible from Shakespeare's day use the phrase "put out" rather than "blot out" in this particular verse.[16]

Similarly, earlier in the play, Richard states that "Lions make leopards tame."[17] Mowbray responds to this by stating, "Yea, but not change his spots."[18] This section refers specifically to the Geneva Bible, which in the book of Jeremiah asks, "Can the blacke More change his skin? or the leopard his spottes?"[19] All other translations have "catte of the mountaine" rather than "leopard" in this passage.[20] Shakespeare's use of the word "leopard" suggests that he was

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[13] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* 20.
[14] William Shakespeare, *Richard II,* ed. Charles R. Forker (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2002), 1.3.201-202.
[15] Shaheen, *Biblical References*, quoted on 100.
[16] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* 100.
[17] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 1.1.174.
[18] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 1.1.175.
[19] Jer. 13.23
[20] Shaheen, *Biblical References*, 97.

quoting the Geneva Bible in this section of dialogue. Because of these clear allusions to particular translations of the bible, Shakespeare undoubtedly used both the Geneva and the Bishops' Bibles throughout *Richard II.* While it is important to know which bible Shakespeare used when alluding to specific passages, the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible are relatively similar enough that it is often unclear which particular translation Shakespeare used. Only in instances where the two bibles used completely different words can a specific version of the bible be cited. For this paper, the Geneva Bible will be used when discussing biblical allusions unless otherwise noted since it appears to be the translation that Shakespeare used most frequently.

Allusions to Genesis

Because Shakespeare lived during a time when the bible was intertwined into nearly every aspect of life, it is often difficult to determine which of his lines are purposeful allusions to Scripture and which are accidental and meaningless references. Purposeful allusions in Shakespeare's plays have a symbolic and metaphorical meaning and allow the text to be expanded and understood in various ways that would go undetected unless read by an audience that is equally familiar with the bible. While there are multiple allusions to the bible, the allusions to the book of Genesis and the Gospels seem to have the strongest impact on *Richard II.* Shakespeare's understanding of history was clearly affected by his knowledge of the Genesis, which he alludes to and references most frequently throughout *Richard II*. One of the most pertinent instances of Shakespeare's allusions to Genesis in his play occurs in the third act in the garden scene. In this scene, the queen learns of the capture and upcoming deposition of Richard by eavesdropping on two gardeners' conversation.

According to the queen, it is because of the gardener that England is experiencing a metaphorical second falling of man. She does not put the blame onto Richard or even onto Bolingbroke, who would be the logical portrayer of Adam in this retelling of Genesis since he is committing the sinful act of deposing Richard. Rather, she ultimately blames the innocent gardener as though he has brought Richard to his deposition. She demands to know "What Eve, what serpent hath suggested thee / To make a second fall of cursed man?"[21] This question derives from the book of Genesis in which Eve states that she ate the forbidden fruit and caused the fall of man because "The serpent beguyled me and I did eat."[22] The queen suggests with this

[21] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.4.75-76.
[22] Gen. 3.13

biblical allusion that something as malevolent as the serpent in Genesis must have seduced the gardener and that is why he states that "Bolingbroke / Hath seized the wasteful King."[23] The queen believes that the mere statement of this is blasphemous; she claims that England is cursed because of the gardener much like how in Genesis God tells Adam "cursed is the earth for thy sake."[24] However, the queen does not seem to believe that the gardener truly is causing Richard's downfall. Rather, her accusations against the gardener seem to be how she is emotionally reacting to this news of Bolingbroke's rebellion.

The various references to Genesis that Shakespeare makes throughout this garden scene has a strong impact on the overall theme of the play. Through the lens of the story of Genesis and the fall of mankind, *Richard II* becomes much more complicated than the mere historical narrative would suggest. No longer is the play about the deposition of a tyrannical king, but rather it is about the fall of England from God's grace. What the queen suggests is that prior to Richard's deposition, England was a prelapsarian paradise as John of Gaunt suggests in his earlier description of England:

> This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,[25]

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[23] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.4.54-55
[24] Gen. 3.17
[25] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 2.1.40-46

As a result of Richard's deposition, the people of England are thrust from their demi-paradise as Adam and Eve were thrust from Eden as a result of their disobedience.[26] However, Gaunt's character would disagree with this view of Richard's reign. It is in this same speech about England that Gaunt implicitly refers to the worst aspects of Richard's reign: he sold the right of collecting taxes to people who are not restrained by any authority, he had a multitude of disliked courtiers, and he spent an exorbitant amount of money both on himself and his various Irish wars.[27] To Gaunt, England fell from grace because under Richard's rule England has been "leased out … / Like to a tenement or pelting farm."[28] Robert Ornstein corroborates this with his argument that England under Richard's reign was not a "prelapsarian paradise, a world of order and harmony that was to be destroyed by a primal sin of disobedience."[29] Ornstein argues that England under Richard's rule was not as harmonious as some passages in Shakespeare's play suggest but rather was full of problems that arose as a result of Richard's various mistakes as king. The culmination of Richard's mistakes and oppressions that are not described by Shakespeare in much detail thus bring about the fall of England historically.[30]

These references to Genesis have an impact on the audience's perception of Richard; if one believes that the deposition of Richard is the cause of a second fall of man, as the queen suggests in the garden scene, then Richard is a martyr, unrightfully removed from the throne. This view allows for the play to seem to be a tragic retelling of history rather than simply the

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[26] Gen. 3.23-24
[27] Northrop Frye, "Richard II and Bolingbroke," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Richard II,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 113.
[28] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 2.1.59-60
[29] Robert Ornstein, "A Kingdom for a Stage," in *Richard II: Critical Essays,* ed. Jeanne T. Newlin (New York: Garland, 1984), 46.
[30] Frye, "Richard II and Bolingbroke," 113.

deposition of a tyrant. However, the beginning of the garden scene implicitly refutes this idea of Richard being unjustly removed from power. One of the gardeners asks:

> Why should we in the compass of a pale
> Keep law and form in due proportion,
> Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,
> When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
> Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
> Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,
> Her knots disordered and her wholesome herbs
> Swarming with caterpillars?[31]

The "sea-walled garden" that the gardener references in undoubtedly England. This comparison of England to a garden reinforces Gaunt's earlier description of England as "this other Eden,"[32] and it also subtly explains to the audience the prominent issues with the country that are a result of Richard's rule as king. The weeds and the caterpillars that the gardener references most likely are symbolic of Richard's courtiers, Bushy, Bagot, and Green. As Nigel Saul argues, one of the main causes of Richard's decline and fall is that he had favored the advice and counsel of younger lords, such as Bushy, Bagot, and Green in Shakespeare's play, over the advice of an older and more experienced counsel.[33] People who were critical of Richard's reign viewed these courtiers as problematic; they believed that Richard was being led astray and making poor decisions as a result of his younger counsel's advice.[34] The other gardener confirms that the

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[31] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 3.4.40-46
[32] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 2.1.42
[33] Nigel Saul, *Richard II*. (Great Britain: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1997), 435.
[34] Saul, *Richard II,* 435.

"weeds which [Richard's] broad-spreading leaves did shelter, / That seemed in eating him to hold him up" are the king's advisors, "the Earl of Whitshire, Bushy, [and] Green."[35]

This same gardener later laments the deaths of Richard's advisors and the downfall of the king, stating that this would not have occurred had Richard "trimmed and dressed his land / As we this garden."[36] This parallels a passage from Genesis where God tells Adam that "Because thou hast obeied the voyce of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tre…cursed is the earth for thy sake."[37] In a similar sense, the gardener seems to be saying that the garden of England is cursed because Richard has listened to the voices of his counsel who gave him poor advice.

Though Richard's youthful counsel is not the sole reason for his downfall, it is one that Shakespeare emphasizes greatly. However, multiple critics agree that Richard's reign was full of other mistakes that Shakespeare does not explain in much detail. As Northrop Frye states, it is only when Gaunt is dying that the audience learns that Richard has sold the right of collecting taxes to people who cannot be restrained by any central authority and that Richard has spent an exorbitant amount of money both on his own pleasures and on his wars in Ireland.[38] Though these are important to the historical accuracy of the play, they do not need to be described in much detail in Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare spends little time explaining the issues with Richard's reign because he was not necessarily interested in historical accuracy, but in "the personal actions and interactions of the people at the top of the social order."[39] Because Shakespeare focuses on a small portion of Richard's reign and compresses time within his play,

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[35] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.4.50-51, 53
[36] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.4.56-57
[37] Gen. 3.17
[38] Frye, "Richard II and Bolingbroke," 113.
[39] Frye, "Richard II and Bolingbroke," 115.

many literary critics argue that he omitted a large portion of Richard's historical record, making it seem as though the main cause of Richard's decline is the expropriation of Bolingbroke.[40]

It is only by subtle references made throughout the play that the audience learns about the various other issues with Richard's reign unless they were already familiar with the historical context of the play. In Act 1, Richard shares with his counsel that "The lining of [Gaunt's] coffers shall make coats / To deck [the] soldiers for these Irish wars."[41] This speech alludes to the economic issues that existed in England as a result of Richard's reign and his attempts to fund various wars. Throughout his reign, Richard had taxed his subjects harshly, and, as a result, his subjects "condemned [Richard's] never-ending taxation and his profligate spending."[42]

Although Shakespeare doesn't go too far into detail about Richard's troubles with taxation and inadequate funding, it is possible that Shakespeare's audience would have been familiar with the relentless taxation that occurred throughout Richard's reign. One of the largest rebellions that occurred while Richard was king was due to a new "manifestly unfair and inequitable" poll tax that was put in place during the late 14th century.[43] While the previous poll tax had been determined by the social status of the tax payers, this new poll tax levied a flat rate of three groats, or approximately one shilling, per person, which was triple the amount of the previous poll tax. By the 1380s, the peasantry had grown resistant to this taxation, and their unrest culminated into the Great Revolt of 1381. Though there had been smaller rebellions in rural areas in the past, this was the first large scale rebellion against the king. For two days, the rebels pillaged and destroyed properties in London as a protest against the king's taxation.

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[40] Ruth Nevo, "The Genre of Richard II," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Richard II,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 14.
[41] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 1.4.61-62
[42] Nigel Saul, "Richard II: Author of His Own Downfall?" *History Today,* September 1999, 36.
[43] Saul, *Richard II*, 56.

Though Richard and his government were eventually able to end the Revolt, it exemplified the political tensions that were building between the king and his subjects by the end of the late 14th century.[44]

Though Shakespeare does not explicitly refer to the Great Revolt, it is highly probable that his audience would have known about it and the impact that it had on Richard's reign. However, by failing to mention Richard's involvement in ending the Revolt, Shakespeare also omits a moment in history where Richard acted as a strong leader. His ability to end a rebellion such as the Great Revolt of 1381 suggests that he was a capable ruler. Had Shakespeare included this in his play, Richard would have appeared in a better light; he would be presented more as a competent ruler rather than as the rash and selfish character that he is presented as throughout Shakespeare's play.

While Shakespeare does not present Richard's taxation as one of the reasons for his decline, Shakespeare does briefly present the murder of the Duke of Gloucester as a prominent cause of Richard's downfall. In the initial scene of the play, Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of "plot[ting] the Duke of Gloucester's death."[45] At the time that Shakespeare wrote this play, it would have been well known by his audience that Richard's uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, was murdered, most likely under Richard's orders.[46] Although Shakespeare does not explicitly state whether or not Richard ordered Gloucester's murder, by having Bolingbroke's accusation be the initial source of conflict in the play, he emphasizes the importance of Gloucester's murder to Richard's reign and subsequent downfall.

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[44] Saul, *Richard II*, 56-64
[45] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 1.1.100
[46] Saul, "Richard II: Author of His Own Downfall?" 37.

Shakespeare again relies heavily on the book of Genesis in Bolingbroke's accusation against Mowbray. In his accusation, Bolingbroke states that Mowbray "sluiced out [Gloucester's] innocent soul through streams of blood – / Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries / Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth."[47] This speech refers to the first act of murder, which occurs in the book of Genesis when "Kain rose vp against Habel his brother, and slewe him. Then the Lord said vnto Kain, Where is Habel thy brother? Who answered, I canot tel. Am I my brothers keper? Againe he said, What hast thou done? the voyce of thy brothers blood cryeth vnto me from the grounde."[48] Shakespeare draws his dialogue in this scene almost directly from Scripture. Bolingbroke's statement that Gloucester's "blood, like sacrificing Abel's cries"[49] to him is nearly identical to God's statement that "the voyce of thy brothers blood cryeth vnto me from the grounde."[50]

This same chapter from Genesis is again referenced in a similar context in the final scene of Shakespeare's play. After the Earl of Exton murders Richard and informs Bolingbroke, Bolingbroke sentences Exton to "With Cain go thorough shades of night, / And never show thy head by day nor light."[51] This is similar to God's punishment for Cain in Genesis; he makes Cain a "vagabonde and a rennegate…in the earth."[52] However, it is evident that Bolingbroke also blames himself for Richard's death. After sentencing Exton to go wander like Cain, Bolingbroke states that he will "make a voyage to the Holy Land / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand."[53] By doing this, Bolingbroke punishes himself for a crime that he did not commit and

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[47] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 1.1.103-105
[48] Gen. 4.8-10
[49] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 1.1.104
[50] Gen. 4.10
[51] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 5.6.43-44
[52] Gen. 4.12
[53] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 5.6.49-50

likens himself to Cain, who murdered his brother out of jealousy. Similarly, Richard's death is a result of Bolingbroke's jealousy. This creates a strong dichotomy between Richard and Bolingbroke. Richard never thinks of himself as Cain, though he most likely had a hand in Gloucester's death. Bolingbroke, however, immediately views himself as a Cain figure, though he had no hand in Richard's murder.

Although Shakespeare's references to the story of Cain and Abel seem to be used to emphasize the acts of murder that frame the play, they also have a powerful impact on the meaning of Shakespeare's play. In the same chapter of Genesis, God tells Cain that his is "cursed fro the earth, [who] hathe opened her mouth to receiue thy brothers blood."[54] This suggests that both Richard and Bolingbroke are also cursed for their partaking in fratricide. Shakespeare's use of this biblical allusion suggests that the underlying cause of the Wars of the Roses and Richard's decline is both men's sin of murder. Much like how the original fall of man was due to Adam's initial sin of eating the forbidden fruit, the Wars of the Roses – the fall of England – is the result of Richard's ordering the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. Saul supports this with his argument that Richard's fall is the result of "hubris followed by nemesis; or in Christian terminology, of God pulling down the proud."[55] Saul emphasizes the reasoning behind Richard's fall from power in his article by stating that it is difficult to describe Richard's fall other than in moral terms because his downfall seems to be the result of some immoral or sinful act,[56] such as the murder of Gloucester that is being punished by God.

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[54] Gen. 4.11
[55] Saul, "Richard II: Author of His Own Downfall?" 37.
[56] Saul, "Richard II: Author of His Own Downfall?" 37.

Divine Right and the Twin-Natured King

Despite Richard's problematic reign, many people did not support Bolingbroke's rebellion against the monarch. Whether the monarch ruled justly or unjustly, Christians during the Middle Ages and Renaissance firmly believed that the king was the "Lord's anointed." This term was used to describe the monarch because in the Old Testament "Samuel toke a viole of oyle and powred it" over Saul's head when he appointed him as king over the Israelites.[57] Even David said multiple times throughout 1 Samuel that he could not go against the divinely chosen king and be free of guilt.[58] Because of this repetition throughout the bible, Christians during this time period believed that rebelling against the monarch was both a sin and an act of treason against God and their country.

It is because of this understanding of divine right that multiple characters throughout *Richard II* refuse to rebel against Richard though they do not condone his actions. For instance, Gaunt is urged by the Duchess of Gloucester to avenge the murder of her late husband. Rather than agreeing to her request, Gaunt explains to her that:

> God's is the quarrel, for God's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in His sight,
> Hath caused his death, the which if wrongfully,
> Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
> An angry arm against His minister.[59]

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[57] 1 Sam. 10.1
[58] 1 Sam. 26
[59] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 1.2.37-41.

In this response, Gaunt explains that he is unable to rebel against Richard because he is "God's substitute" and "His deputy anointed." Gaunt believes that an act of rebellion against the monarch is comparable to an act of rebellion against God. Gaunt's description of Richard as God's minister also seems to allude to Paul's letters to the Romans. In his letters, Paul repeatedly describes the monarch as "the minister of God,"[60] which Gaunt echoes in his explanation to the Duchess.

Similarly, the Bishop of Carlisle adamantly defends the doctrine of divine right and remains loyal to Richard despite Bolingbroke's rebellion against the king. Carlisle describes Richard as "the figure of God's majesty, / His captain, steward, deputy elect" who is ordained by God to rule over England.[61] His firm belief that Richard is anointed by God leads him to call the act of rebellion against the king "so heinous, black obscene a deed" not only against the monarch, but against heaven as well.[62] Carlisle laments the coming deposition of Richard and sees this event as a harbinger of the fall of England. In this speech, Carlisle prophesizes that:

> The blood of English shall manure the ground,
> And future ages groan for this foul act.
> Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
> And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars,
> Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound.
> Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
> Shall here inhabit, and this land be called
> The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.

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[60] Rom. 13.4.
[61] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.126-127.
[62] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.132.

O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woefullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth.
Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,
Lest child, child's children, cry against you, 'Woe!'[63]

Carlisle's prophecy foreshadows the Wars of the Roses, which begins shortly after the deposition of Richard, when the tensions between houses of York and Lancaster culminate into violence and war. Earlier in Shakespeare's play, Gaunt also foreshadows this war with his comparison of England to the garden of Eden.[64] Both of these characters seem to be aware that the political tensions between Richard and Bolingbroke will culminate into violence. As Carlisle predicts, "Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny" inhabit England throughout this tumultuous war.

Carlisle's warning of what will happen if Bolingbroke "raise[s] this house against this house,"[65] alludes to a verse from the Gospel of Mark which states "if a house be deuided against it self, that house can not continue."[66] Though Carlisle omits the second half of this verse, his speech implies that England cannot remain intact if Bolingbroke's rebellion continues. An earlier verse in this chapter of the Gospel of Mark also asks how Satan can drive out Satan[67] which suggests that Carlisle does not agree with Richard's reign, but he also does not believe that Bolingbroke should defy him. If he is alluding to this question posed in the Gospel of Mark, then Carlisle believes it to be impossible for Bolingbroke to drive out from England unjust rule when he is acting unjustly against Richard.

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[63] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 4.1.138-150.
[64] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 2.1.31-68.
[65] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 4.1.146.
[66] Mark 3.25
[67] Mark 3.23

Carlisle continues his warning by stating that England will be called "The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls."[68] This alludes to various passages in the Gospels, which explain that, in Hebrew, Golgotha translates to the place of dead men's skulls and is the place of Christ's crucifixion.[69] Through this allusion, Carlisle likens Richard to Christ; he imagines that England will become the place of another crucifixion or death and despair if Bolingbroke continues his rebellion and deposes the divinely chosen king. As violence terrorizes England throughout the Wars of the Roses, death will consume the country, effectively turning England into its own Golgotha as Carlisle prophesizes.

By having Gaunt and Carlisle act as the strongest supporters of the monarchy, Shakespeare suggests that the idea of divine right is a religiously grounded idea of the past. Gaunt is described as "time-honoured Lancaster"[70] and defends the doctrine of divine right because of tradition, whereas the Bishop of Carlisle defends it because of its religious implications. That these two characters are the main supporters of divine right brings into question Shakespeare's own beliefs. Throughout his play, Shakespeare seems to be arguing that divine right harms subjects and kings more so than it protects them.[71] Rebecca Lemon supports this idea in her argument that the belief in divine right forces people, such as John of Gaunt, to succumb to absolute obedience, which only allows a tyrannous monarch to continue lawless rule.[72] That Richard expropriates Gaunt's estate immediately after his death exemplifies Richard's lax regard for the law and also presents the dangers of blind obedience to a monarch.

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[68] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.145.
[69] Mark 15.22, John 19.17, Matt. 27.33
[70] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 1.1.1.
[71] Rebecca Lemon, "Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Elizabethan Politics," ed. Jeremy Lopez (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 256.
[72] Lemon, "Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Elizabethan Politics," 256.

There is no tragic nor heroic end for Gaunt; his strong belief in the monarch only leads to the banishment of his son and the loss of his estate. His death occurs in a single scene of the play and is not discussed throughout the remainder of the text. Similarly, the Bishop of Carlisle gains nothing by remaining loyal throughout the entirety of the play to Richard and the doctrine of divine right. Despite his warnings to Bolingbroke and his followers, Carlisle is unable to convince them to end their rebellion. Instead, he is brought into custody at the end of his speech and is not mentioned much throughout the remainder of the play. Much like Gaunt, he has no tragic nor very heroic end; his warnings, though passionate, are mostly ignored.

Though Richard also strongly supports the idea of divine right, he meets a different end than Gaunt and Carlisle. Because of his belief that he was divinely chosen by God to rule, he initially does not fear that he will be affected by Bolingbroke's rebellion. When he first learns of Bolingbroke's political ambitions, he declares that:

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord.[73]

By stating this, Richard shares with his followers that he believes nothing in this world can negatively affect him or any other divinely appointed monarch. He firmly believes that God chose him to rule over England, and he cannot be deposed by a worldly person such as Bolingbroke.

[73] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.2.54-57.

Richard's understanding of divine right is reinforced in the following scene when he asks Northumberland to "show us the hand of God / That hath dismissed us from our stewardship."[74] He claims that "every stride [Bolingbroke] makes upon my land / Is dangerous treason"[75] because Richard truly believes that he is the rightful king appointed by God. This statement is reflective of the Tudor doctrine that argues that civil rulers are appointed by God, and therefore only God has the ability to remove them from power.[76] Someone who defies a monarch, such as Bolingbroke, is committing treason since God is the only being able to take away the power bestowed upon a king. The homily "Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates" supports this idea by stating that no one can "withstand, nor in any wise hurt and anointed King, which is GODS lieftenant … and highest minister in that countrey where he is King."[77] Through Richard's dramatic monologues, Shakespeare subtly alludes to this homily in order to emphasize Richard's complete faith in the divine right of monarchs. It isn't until his trial before Parliament that Richard finally realizes that he has lost the throne to Bolingbroke. Despite this, Richard still asserts his power by maintaining control over his own deposition. He states that:

> With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
>
> With mine own hands I give away my crown,
>
> With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
>
> With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.[78]

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[74] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 3.3.77-78.
[75] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 3.3.92-93.
[76] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* 103.
[77] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* 103.
[78] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.207-210.

By repeating the phrase "mine own" in his denouncement of the throne, Richard continuously reminds Bolingbroke and the other people present that it is only by his power that Bolingbroke can ascend the throne.

That Richard is only able to be released of his oaths by his *own* breath suggests that "Man's breath appears to Richard as something inconsistent with kingship."[79] This idea is first mentioned in a previous act of the play by Carlisle, who emphasizes that "The breath of worldly men cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord."[80] These parallel lines exemplify the idea that the king is not a worldly or ordinary man. Rather, as Ernst Kantorowicz theorizes, he is composed of two radically different bodies: a Body natural that is "subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age," and a Body politic that "cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government."[81] Although these two bodies seem to be separate, they combine together to form the character of Richard. As the Lord's anointed, he acts as the mediator between worldly men and God. Kantorowicz argues that "every mediatorship implies, one way or another, the existence of a twin-natured being."[82] From this passage by Kantorowicz, it can be assumed that Richard, as the mediator between heaven and earth, must be a twin-natured being composed of his natural, temporal body and his immortal kingly body. However, these two bodies are so intertwined that Richard becomes lost after his deposition. After relinquishing the crown, Richard laments:

I have no name, no title –

No, not that name was given me at the font –

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[79] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies.* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 27.
[80] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.2.56-57.
[81] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies,* 7.
[82] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies,* 88.

> But ‘tis usurped. Alack the heavy day,
>
> That I have worn so many winters out
>
> And know not now what name to call myself.[83]

Without his kingship, Richard no longer knows what his name is, since his very title was a part of his Body politic and not his Body natural.

[83] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.255-259.

Richard as Christ

Despite being blatantly depressed and lost during his deposition, Richard makes numerous attempts to convince those present that he is still in complete control of the event. At the beginning of the deposition scene, Richard first tries to maintain a certain hierarchy by raising himself to the level of Christ by making repeated accusations that allude to Judas's betrayal. Upon first entering the scene, he states:

> Yet I well remember
> The favours of these men. Were they not mine?
> Did they not sometime cry 'All hail' to me?
> So Judas did to Christ, but He in twelve
> Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand,
> none.[84]

This particular reference to Judas's greeting of Christ does not appear to derive directly from any of the translations of the bible that were available to Shakespeare. Nearly all Protestant translations have Judas declare "Haile master" in the Gospels rather than "All hail" as Shakespeare quotes in his text.[85] In the Geneva Bible, which Shakespeare seems to reference the most often, has Judas say "God saue thee, Master"[86] most likely to avoid the Catholic association with the word *hail.* Shakespeare's use of the phrase "All hail" seems to reference a medieval play entitled *The Agony and the Betrayal* in which Judas greets Christ by saying "All hayll, maistir."[87]

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[84] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.168-172.
[85] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* 112-113.
[86] Matt. 26.49
[87] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* 243

Although Shakespeare's use of the phrase "All hail" derives from literary works other than the bible, Richard's statement that Christ "in twelve / Found truth in all but one; [Richard] in twelve thousand, none"[88] clearly alludes to details from the New Testament and draws parallels between Christ's betrayal and Richard's. However, Richard attempts to describe his betrayal as much worse than that of Christ. He argues that Christ was only betrayed by a single man, whereas Richard believes that he was betrayed by all of his subjects.

The audience should immediately recognize Richard's statement as a fallacious exaggeration, as many of Richard's courtiers and subjects devotedly followed him. Throughout the play, Shakespeare shows varying opinions of Richard's reign in order to convey the idea that, while many of his followers did betray him, multiple characters remained loyal throughout the entirety of his reign. Richard's queen clearly did not betray him; she was so distraught that when she initially learned of his upcoming deposition, she likened the event to a "second fall of cursed man."[89] This description suggests that she viewed the deposition of Richard to be a tragedy to all of mankind, which is a belief that someone disloyal to Richard would not possess. Similarly, both the Bishop of Carlisle and John of Gaunt remain loyal to Richard because of their unwavering belief in the doctrine of divine right. Richard's belief that "in twelve thousand, none"[90] remained loyal to him is indisputably incorrect based off the information that Shakespeare provides throughout the play. Earlier in the play, Richard was quick to accuse his former courtiers Bushy, Bagot, and Green of betraying him by calling them "Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas"[91] before he learns of their executions. These repeated references to

[88] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.171-172.
[89] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.4.76.
[90] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.172.
[91] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 3.2.132.

Judas throughout the play seem to have been borrowed from the *Chronique de la Traïson et Mort de Richart Deux Roy Dengleterre,* which Naseeb Shaheen believes to be one of Shakespeare's sources in writing *Richard II.* The *Traïson*'s reference to Judas is applied not to Richard's former courtiers Bushy, Bagot, and Green, but to the Earl of Northumberland whom Bolingbroke sends as a messenger to Richard prior to his capture. At mass, Northumberland "placed his hand upon the body of our Lord, which was upon the altar, in the presence of the King, and of the lords and swore that all that he had said to the King from Henry of Lancaster was true; in which he perjured himself wickedly and falsely." For betraying Richard in this way, the narrator of the *Traïson* states that he "can only be likened to Judas."[92]

Because in the *Traïson* it is the narrator who likens Richard to Christ, the allusion is easier to believe, whereas in *Richard II,* it is Richard who repeatedly likens himself to Christ through drastic accusations. Richard's often untrustworthy and tyrannical portrayal throughout Shakespeare's play makes viewing him as a Christ-like figure difficult even though he too is betrayed by his once loyal followers. Despite these unsuccessful parallels, Richard continues the deposition by repeatedly trying to make connections between his dethronement and Christ's crucifixion. In subsequent lines, he states:

> Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
> Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates
> Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
> And water cannot wash away your sin.[93]

[92] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* quoted on 107.
[93] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.239-242.

This passage alludes to the Gospel of Matthew, in which "When Pilate sawe that hee auailed nothing…he tooke water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying [he is] innocent of the bloud of this iust man."[94] By alluding to this passage, Richard implies that he is the "just man," or Christ, and that those deposing him are claiming to be innocent although they are ultimately delivering him "to [his] sour cross."[95] This biblical allusion allows for Richard to be viewed as a Christ-like figure much like his previous allusions. However, this references appears to be even harsher than his earlier accusations had been. Instead of likening his former followers to Judas who betrayed Christ, he now likens them to Pilate who personally delivered Christ to his crucifixion. This reference to Pilate appears to have also been borrowed from Jean Creton's *Histoire du Roy d'Angleterre Richard.* In this text, the narrator states that "At this hour did [Bolingbroke] remind [him] of Pilate…Much in the like manner did [Bolingbroke], when he gave up his rightful lord to the rabble of London, in order that, if they should put him to death, he might say, 'I am innocent of this deed.'"[96] There is also a brief reference to Pilate in Holinshed's *Chronicles* in which the narrator states that the Archbishop of Canterbury "prophesied not as a prelat, but as a Pilat."[97] Shakespeare's allusions to Pilate appear to be derivative of the allusions in both of these source materials. Although Creton, Holinshed, and Shakespeare all compare different characters to Pontus Pilate, they do so in order to emphasize the severity of Bolingbroke's betrayal to Richard. By having Richard present the allusion to Pilate, Shakespeare makes it unclear whether he views Richard's dethronement as an act of heretical betrayal or not.

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[94] Matt. 27.24
[95] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.241.
[96] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* quoted on 179.
[97] Shaheen, *Biblical References,* quoted on 179.

Although these allusions to Christ's betrayal and crucifixion seem to be derivative of Shakespeare's source material, Richard's multiple references to Pilate and Judas play an important role as Richard attempts to understand his twin-natured self. Though Richard ultimately has no other choice than to relinquish the crown by the end of the deposition scene, Richard views himself as a traitor to the throne for having done so. Kantorowicz theorizes that Richard places so much blame on himself because "Richard realizes that he, when facing his Lancastrian Pilate, is not at all like Christ, but that he himself, Richard, has his place among the Pilates and Judases, because he is no less a traitor than the others, or is even worse than they are: he is a traitor to his own immortal body politic and to kingship such as it had been to his day."[98] Richard's monologue here epitomizes the idea of the king's two bodies. It is only possible for Richard to be both a traitor to the crown and a victim of Bolingbroke's revolt if he and the kingship could be separate. In this instance, the play suggests that the Body natural of Richard has ultimately committed treason against the Body politic of *King* Richard.

Throughout the deposition scene, Richard continues to meditate on his understanding of his twin-natured self. The pinnacle of this meditation occurs when Richard requests a mirror during his trial. Upon looking into the mirror, Richard wonders:

> Was this the face
> That like the sun did make beholders wink?
> Is this the face which faced so many follies,
> That was at last outfaces by Bolingbroke?
> A brittle glory shineth in this face –

[98] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies,* 38.

As brittle as the glory is the face![99]

What Richard sees in the mirror is not the pompous Body politic of a king or of the Lord's anointed, but merely a melancholic man. The deposition scene reaches its climax as Richard shatters the mirror on the ground, thereby marking the death of his Body politic and the end of his reign as king, "For there it is, cracked in a hundred shivers."[100]

That Richard continuously compares himself to Christ suggests that he views himself as a victim of Bolingbroke's rebellion. By likening himself to Christ, Richard suggests that he is purely innocent. This, however, cannot be true, as Richard also categorizes himself with the Judases and Pilates. Had Richard not referred to himself as a traitor, it would seem as though he only blamed his former followers and Bolingbroke for his deposition. Richard instead takes responsibility for his deposition since he is the one who denounces the throne and essentially unkings himself.

To Richard, his deposition is inevitable. Though Bolingbroke does not explicitly state that he wants to seize the throne, it is clear after Richard's arrest that there is no other option. Similarly, Bolingbroke never states that Richard will be killed. This is another event that Richard assumes will happen and knows he cannot stop. It seems as though Richard likening himself to Christ is not the result of his inflamed ego or understanding of divine right. Richard sees himself as a Christ-like figure because he has no control over his deposition and death. Much like how Christ recognized that he could not prevent his crucifixion, so too does Richard see that he cannot prevent his own downfall.

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[99] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.281-287.
[100] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 4.1.289.

There are multiple ways that Richard's allusions to Christ's crucifixion and his death can be interpreted. One could argue that Richard views his mere deposition as a form of death. Without the throne, Richard loses his sense of identity as his Body politic is severed from his Body natural. The end of Richard's Body politic acts as a metaphorical death – he no longer has a name or sense of purpose. While Richard could be equating his deposition to death, there is also a possibility that Richard knows his death is inevitable. Much like how Christ at the Last Supper knew that he would soon be executed, Richard too appears to realize that his death is approaching as Bolingbroke rises to power.

Even after the deposition scene, Richard continues to act as a Christ figure. However, he no longer explicitly calls people Judases and Pilates; he instead begins to quote and preach portions of the bible to himself in his cell in the Tower. He attempts to fill the silence and emptiness with his thoughts and decides to meditate specifically on what he believes to be contradictory passages in Scripture. He recites:

> 'Come, little ones';
>
> And then again:
>
> 'It is as hard to come as for a camel
>
> To thread the postern of a small needle's eye.'[101]

While both of these verses that Richard recites originate in the Gospel of Mark, they oppose each other because they are taken out of context. Richard first quotes Christ who in the Gospel of Mark says, "Suffre the litle childre to come vnto me, & forbid them not: for suche is the kingdome of God."[102] Within this verse's biblical context, it is meant to urge parents to bring

[101] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 5.5.14-17.
[102] Mark 10.14

their children to Christ. Similarly, in the second verse which Richard partially recites, Christ says, "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches, to entre into the kingdome of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a nedle, then for a riche man to entre into the kingdome of God."[103] When presented in their entirety, these verses suggest that children should trust in Christ, and that those who put more trust in their wealth will struggle to enter heaven. Richard seems to recognize that he is putting these two passages at opposition with one another by stating that "thoughts of things divine, are intermixed / With scruples and do set the word itself against the word."[104] Through this statement, he suggests that he views himself both as the innocent children which are referenced in the initial verse but also as a man who puts too much faith in his riches as in the latter verses who will find difficulty in entering into heaven. In this passage, Richard is both presenting himself as an innocent Christ-like figure but also undermining that analogy by misunderstanding biblical verses in relation to each other.

In the same scene, Richard continues to quote the bible by saying "pride must have a fall"[105] which parallels a passage in the Book of Proverbs that states that "Pride goeth before destruction, and an high minde before the fall."[106] Richard's quoting of the bible again invokes an image of him as a Christ-like figure. However, he also seems to be reflecting on another verse in the Book of Proverbs in addition which states that "The pride of a man shal bring him lowe: but the humble in spirit shal enjoye glorie."[107] These passages in the bible propose a reason for Richard's downfall, which Saul argues is the main cause of Richard's decline: it was an act of

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[103] Mark 10.24-25
[104] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 5.5.12-13.
[105] Shakespeare, *Richard II,* 5.5.88.
[106] Prov. 29.33
[107] Prov. 24.23

"God pulling down the proud."[108] These two different verses from Proverbs both emphasize the destructive capabilities of pride, which seems to be the prominent reason for Richard's deposition in Shakespeare's play. His pride ultimately led him to be an unjust and unfit monarch, despite believing himself to be a divinely chosen ruler. This belief led him to expropriate Bolingbroke's inheritance, tax relentlessly, and refuse advice of an older counsel, which allowed Bolingbroke to gain enough support to depose him.

[108] Saul, "Richard II: Author of His Own Downfall?" 37.

Richard II and the Essex Revolt

While these references to Richard as a Christ-like figure have a strong impact on his characterization in the play, earlier editions omitted a vast majority of them. The first three editions of *Richard II* did not include the deposition scene in which Richard alludes most heavily to Christ's betrayal. The controversial deposition scene was not included in any printed copies of the play until after Elizabeth's death in 1603.[109] The 1608 Quarto is believed to be the first edition of Shakespeare's play to include this infamous scene since it advertises on the title page that it includes "new additions of the Parlia/ment Sceane, and the deposing/of King Richard."[110] The use of the phrase "new additions" suggests that the deposition scene might not have been written and included in the play until after Elizabeth's death. However, it is also possible that the infamous deposition scene existed but had not been included in printed copies of the play until this time.

Despite the deposition scene not being included until later editions of the play, the play still seems to have been extremely controversial and politically sensitive in Shakespeare's day since it presented the feasibility of dethroning a reigning monarch, specifically a childless monarch. During Elizabeth's reign, there was a growing political instability as her subjects became wary about her lack of a definite successor to the throne.[111] As a result, Richard seems to stand "for the threat of the future, namely the threat of a successor emerging from an early modern political landscape marked by tyrannical rule"[112] as Rebecca Lemons argues. This is not to say that Shakespeare was attempting to advise Elizabeth on how to rule successfully, but

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[109] Martin Coyle, *William Shakespeare: Richard II.* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 14.
[110] Coyle, *William Shakespeare,* quoted on 14.
[111] Lemon, "Elizabethan Politics," 247.
[112] Lemon, "Elizabethan Politics," 247.

rather his play was a way for him to voice his fears about the political instability during Elizabeth's reign. Much like other English subjects, he seems to fear the possibility of the rise of a tyrant and general political instability due to an uncertainty as to who would rule after Elizabeth's death. However, scholars such as Nigel Saul argue that "It is doubtful if Shakespeare himself intended his play to be read in such directly political terms…For the most part, his treatment of Richard appears to have been determined by his sources" and the "anti-Ricardian tone of Acts I and II reflects his reliance on Holinshed."[113] While Shakespeare clearly has borrowed language from Holinshed and his other sources, it is uncertain whether he criticized Richard's reign through his play as a result of the historical sources that he read or as a way for him to comment on the fears of the majority during the Elizabethan era.

However, many people in the Elizabethan era seem to have believed that *Richard II* was reflective of the political instability of their own day. In February of 1601, supporters of the Earl of Essex paid the Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform *Richard II* supposedly on the eve of their planned rebellion against Queen Elizabeth.[114] There is evidence that *Richard II* was performed at that time since Augustine Phillips, one of the Globe shareholders, stated that they had initially been unwilling to perform the play for Essex and his followers because it was "so old and so long out of use" that it was unlikely to attract a crowd.[115] Many scholars also believe that Essex specifically wanted *Richard II* to be performed because he descended from the Duke of Gloucester whose murder ignited the plot of Shakespeare's play.[116] From this perspective, the Earl of Essex appears to have believed himself to be the rightful monarch since he descended

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[113] Saul, *Richard II,* 3-4.
[114] Coyle, *William Shakespeare,* 21.
[115] Coyle, *William Shakespeare,* quoted on 21.
[116] Coyle, *William Shakespeare,* 21.

from a man who was only removed from the throne because of an unjust murder. While Essex's motives for his rebellion against Elizabeth are still unclear, he does seem to view Shakespeare's depiction of Richard as similar to Queen Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, too, was indisputably aware of the similarities between herself and Shakespeare's characterization of Richard. She is believed to have said to one of her courtiers after Essex's attempted rebellion, "I am Richard II. Know you not that?"[117] This statement exemplifies that Elizabeth saw herself as analogous to Richard. However, it is unclear whether she believed herself to act tyrannously as Richard had, or if she believed the Essex rebellion to be an unjust betrayal against her and the monarchy as Bolingbroke's betrayal to Richard can be perceived. Because the editions of *Richard II* that were published prior to Elizabeth's death omitted the controversial deposition scene, Elizabeth appears to have been concerned that her subjects would want to depose of her, perhaps due to her unpopular reign. This suggests that she saw her downfalls as a monarch reflected in Shakespeare's depiction of Richard. Scholars such as Stanley Wells and Lena Cowen Orlin corroborate this understanding with their argument that Elizabeth "seemed to think that any analogy between herself and a deposed king were seditious."[118] Clearly Elizabeth recognized the dangers of being categorized with a tyrannous monarch who was ultimately deposed and most likely kept Shakespeare's *Richard II* censored throughout her lifetime as a result.

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[117] Lena Cowen Orlin and Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide.* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), quoted on 145.
[118] Orlin and Wells, *An Oxford Guide,* 145.

Conclusion

Though the Essex Revolt ultimately failed, it reinforces the idea that Shakespeare's *Richard II* contains important themes that can be applied to various time periods. Shakespeare's use of biblical allusions allows for various characters' motives to be interpreted by the audience in different ways and adds to the ambiguity of the play's themes. Though there are countless more references to the bible in *Richard II,* the most explicit and powerful allusions are to the book of Genesis, the doctrine of divine right as set out in the book of Samuel and reiterated throughout the gospels, and Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. The allusions to these particular passages in the bible allow for the play to expand on the historical story of Richard II's deposition.

As discussed in previous sections of this paper, many of the allusions to the book of Genesis compare England to the Garden of Eden, both as a prelapsarian paradise and a place fallen from grace. This comparison is made explicitly by John of Gaunt prior to his death when he refers to England as a demi-paradise or another Eden. This first introduces to the audience the idea that England at one point had been a paradise; John of Gaunt's speech suggests that Richard is at fault for England now falling from grace. A similar idea is voiced later in the play by two gardeners who suggest that England's fall is due to Richard's failures as king. In contrast, the Bishop of Carlisle argues that England will fall from grace if Bolingbroke deposes Richard, the Lord's anointed.

This argument that is made by Carlisle reiterates the importance of divine right which is mentioned repeatedly throughout the course of the play. Even John of Gaunt who blames Richard for England's decline refuses to lift a hand against the divinely chosen king. Throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, there was a general belief throughout England that the

king was chosen by God to lead over a group of people. As Kantorowicz theorizes in his *The King's Two Bodies,* the king is understood during this time period as both a mortal person and an eternal mediator between heaven and earth. In other words, he is composed of two bodies – a Body natural and a Body politic. While the book of Samuel first introduces the idea of the divinely chosen king, the idea that the king is composed of two opposing bodies seems to evolve over time as people redefine what it must mean to be chosen by God to lead.

The idea of the king's two bodies allows for Richard to equate himself with Christ throughout various points in the play, though he does so explicitly during his deposition scene. Because Richard views himself as the mediator between heaven and earth, he equates his followers who betray him with Judas and Pilate, who betrayed Christ and delivered him to his crucifixion. Although Richard's negative traits that he exhibits throughout the play make it difficult for the audience to equate him with Christ, the doctrine of divine right allows for many comparisons to be drawn between the two. Much of Richard's dialogue throughout the final scenes of the play are drawn directly from varying books of the bible and reinforce the comparison between Richard and Christ to the audience.

Though many scholars still debate whether or not Richard should be viewed as a Christ figure, it is clear from Richard's own lines that he wishes for his audience to equate him with Christ. It is Richard who draws the various similarities throughout his deposition scene as he struggles to understand the effects of his deposition. While it is unclear whether Richard truly views himself as similar to Christ, the use of allusions to Christ's betrayal and crucifixion are explicit instances in which Shakespeare intertwines passages from the bible into his writing. Much like the references to the book of Genesis and the book of Samuel, Shakespeare's references to the gospels in the New Testament allow for his historical play to be expanded and

interpreted in varying ways. Because of the ambiguities of the play that are a result of its multiple biblical allusions and references to various source materials, it is unclear if Shakespeare intended for his play to be understood in terms of Elizabethan politics as Essex's followers seemed to have understood it, or if it was meant to be a dramatized retelling of history. The immersion of the bible in all aspects of English life during Shakespeare's time adds opposing layers of meaning to *Richard II,* making it a controversial play even in the modern day as it seems to bring into question who was meant to be king or queen during and after the Wars of the Roses.

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